

Monday, April 29, 2019

Dear President Mantello and Council Members,

I write on behalf of the Friends of Prospect Park (the friends) in regard to the developing plans by the Dog Park Committee for the establishment of a dog park in Prospect Park.

The friends is a not-for-profit conservancy established in 1997 by citizens concerned about the decline and neglect of Troy's Prospect Park. In the 1990s the park had become terribly overgrown and a hub for illegal and derelict behavior. The playground had become unsafe with dilapidated equipment. The overlooks were overgrown and had become dumping areas for tons of refuse (tires, appliances, construction debris, garbage). There were no longer benches for respite and the picnic areas were overgrown, lacking decent tables and grills, and what was there was in poor condition. The restrooms were unkempt and the entire building was covered in graffiti. The tennis courts were in need of major repair and lacked good management. Most of the cleared public spaces were overgrown and had not been mowed or raked in years. The urban forest and tree specimens had not been maintained in decades. New plantings were no longer a priority.

The friends, over the past 20+ years, have invested, with the help of many groups, thousands of man-hours. In addition, the friends, through fundraising and grants, have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars to improve and repair much. Many of these improvements have been to address and correct the earlier mentioned problems. The friends have also sponsored many cultural and educational programs in the park. They have sponsored concert series, cycling events, summer children's programs, historic tours, and semi-annual community workdays.

The friends have collaborated and financially supported productive endeavors with the Troy Tennis Association, the Rensselaer County Historical Society, the Boy and Girl Scouts of the Capital Region, and many area schools and universities.

The mission of the friends is to protect, preserve, and enhance the beauty that is Prospect Park. As you can see, the friends have always worked with groups to enhance the park experience and expand the activities of the park.

In the matter of the dog park, the friends have, over the years, met with several different groups looking to establish a dog park at Prospect Park. Most recently, we met with the current group whose proposal has come before the City Council. The friends met with the group, walked the park and made some recommendations for possible spaces that we felt were suitable. The criteria for our selection was to choose a space that has not been cultivated and used regularly by park-goers (the meadow, the playground area and picnicking spaces) to adopt an underutilized space, and to increase attendance in the park. The friends encouraged the Dog Park Committee to look at sites that were currently under-utilized and could be developed. Present spaces, which have been, over the years, restored and maintained for specific activities, should not be considered. It would be

counterproductive to do this. The first choice, in the proposal, submitted by the Dog Park Committee is not reclaiming space. They have chosen a space that will be eliminating a space designated for other use.

In the proposal presented to the City Council, the Dog Park Committee states the following:

“The site is a relatively flat area that is covered in grass, making it an easier and more affordable area in which to install the necessary materials for a dog park, as well as to maintain one. The site has a few large trees and a telephone pole with a light, lending to both shade during the day and visibility in early evening hours.”

We would like to note that the statement above defines the reason for choosing the site for a dog park was because it is a relatively flat space that is covered in grass, making it easier and more affordable. This space is both of these things because it has, over the years, been reclaimed and developed to be available for residents to picnic, play and rest. All of this has been done through the efforts of the friends working with the City of Troy.

In addition, the proposal goes on to state:

“The recommended site was also preferred by the committee to two other potential sites considered in Prospect Park. One of these other sites, highlighted in orange on the map above, is located by the old swimming pool. The other site, highlighted in yellow, is located in the area off Hale Street. While both of these sites also came with their own particular benefits, the recommended site was preferred to these two areas due to the relatively readiness of the grounds for a park”

Once again, the committee stresses their selection of the site due to its readiness.

The dog committee also mentions in the proposal the advantage of lighting near the site for nighttime use. We would like to note that Prospect Park is closed and not to be used at night.

We still recommend to the dog committee the area at Hale Street. This area would be available more than six months a year and in the evening. It will need more commitment, work, and resources from the committee, but we believe it will serve the people of Troy better. In addition, it will add a constant and positive presence to a much-neglected area.

The friends stay committed to collaborating with the Dog Park Committee, but would like to see it at the Hale Street location.

Thank you,

Peter Grimm

President, Friends of Prospect Park

